

# **Road Safety Audits & Road Safety Audit Reviews**

## **Executive Summary**

Road safety audits (RSAs) are a proactive approach to improving transportation safety. An RSA is an examination of a future or existing roadway, in which an independent, qualified auditor reports on safety issues. It is a way for your agency to improve safety and communicate to the public how your agency is proactively working toward crash reduction. The step-by-step procedure of an RSA can be performed during any or all stages of a project, including planning, preliminary design, detailed design, traffic control planning, construction, pre-opening, and on existing roads. For an existing road, the RSA is effectively a review and is discussed as a road safety audit review (RSAR).

RSAs have been used successfully worldwide for a number of years. In only the last couple of years, agencies in the United States have begun to focus on RSAs. Worldwide, the RSA concept has proven to be highly effective in identifying and reducing the crash potential of roadway projects. Globally it is estimated that one million fatalities result from motor vehicle crashes each year. The potential savings—in lives, serious injuries, and property damage—is incalculable.

Several state departments of transportation (DOTs) have begun to incorporate RSAs along with their existing efforts to enhance safety. A program in Pennsylvania has successfully implemented road safety audits in the design phase. In New York, the DOT is integrating RSAs within their pavement overlay program. This practical approach to improving road safety can be implemented in spite of limited resources and the ongoing need to focus on maintenance and operations. There are at least 10 DOTs involved in beginning RSA programs to date.

Although concerns have been raised that the use of road safety audits would increase an agency's liability, in fact, just the opposite is true. Implementing a plan to reduce the crash potential and improve the safety performance of a roadway is actually a proactive approach to safety and should be used in defense of tort liability. This is particularly true of RSAs performed in the early stages of a project. Identifying and documenting safety issues on an existing roadway is not an admission of guilt. Rather, it is the first step in a process designed to improve safety. Proper documentation, communication and logical prioritization of an agency's plan to address safety issues would be difficult to fault.

Road safety audits, adaptable to local needs and conditions, are a powerful tool for state and local agencies to enhance the state of safety practices in the United States. The value of the RSA process in identifying roadway safety issues makes it an important component of any agency's safety strategy.